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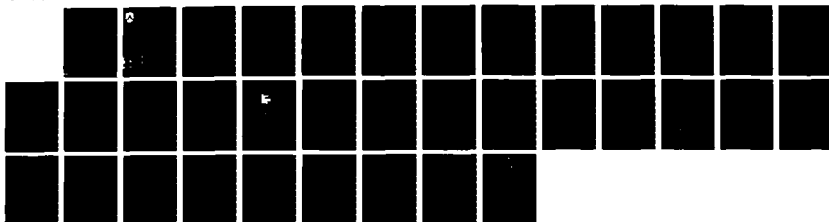
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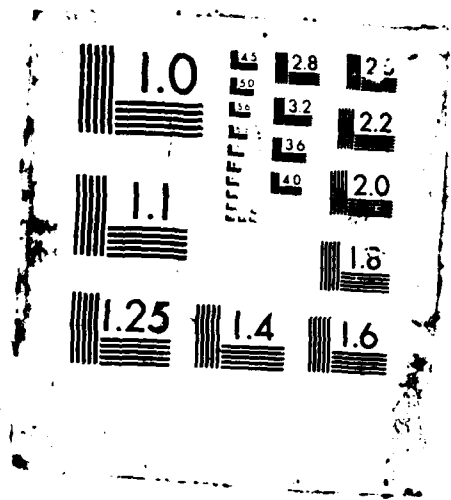
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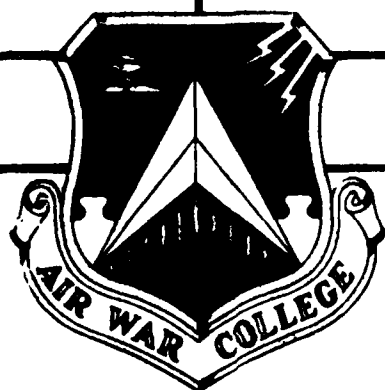
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# AIR WAR COLLEGE

## RESEARCH REPORT

No. AU-AWC-86-091

IT IS TIME FOR A NEW APPROACH TO UNITED STATES  
FOREIGN POLICY

By LT COL NICK C. HARRIS, USA

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**AIR WAR COLLEGE  
AIR UNIVERSITY**

**IT IS TIME FOR A NEW APPROACH TO UNITED STATES  
FOREIGN POLICY**

**by**

**Nick C. Harris  
Lieutenant Colonel, USA**

**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY**

**IN**

**FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH**

**REQUIREMENT**

**Research Advisor: Dr. David E. Allbright**

**MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA**

**May 1986**

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**AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT**

**TITLE: It Is Time For A New Approach To United States  
Foreign Policy**

**AUTHOR: Nick C. Harris, Lieutenant Colonel, USA**

The paper looks at the historical aspect of United States foreign policy. The measurable results of our foreign policy have been less than satisfactory because we have tended to focus our dealings on individual countries without regard to the United States' true national interests and objectives. This weakness in our foreign policy development, coupled with great turmoil in our political system, has led to great pressure on our foreign policy process. A proposed foreign policy is developed as a solution to this short coming.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Lieutenant Colonel Nick C. Harris was commissioned in 1966 as a United States Army Field Artillery Officer. He attended Boise State University and Auburn University at Montgomery where he received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Administration and a Masters of Public Administration Degree. He has commanded multiple units to include a Field Artillery Battalion at Fort Lewis, Washington as part of a high-tech motorized division concept. He also served as a member of the President's battle staff on the Airborne Command Post.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since our founding fathers formed our government some two hundred years ago, significant change has occurred in international affairs and in our relations with other nations. What seemed to be an adequate way of dealing with the outside world for the emerging thirteen states does not seem to be adequate in the contemporary setting. In Michael Nacht's article, "American Security Interests Around The World," he states:

**The net result of these developments has been increased fragmentation of authority throughout the federal policy-making process. (9:257)**

One just has to read the paper to soon recognize that today the United States is not perceived by many countries as a great nation.

It is the intent of this paper to suggest that there is a better way to develop foreign policy and that our focus has been centered too exclusively on the preclusion of communist expansionism. This paper will provide a background of previous foreign policies and then, using Central America as a model, will propose a more progressive approach to dealing with our responsibilities and with other nation states.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

Our foreign policy has been expressed by ideas such as, avoid entanglements, the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, Flexible Response, and Containment. These slogans were an attempt to explain our national interest and focus our attention on those things that were essential as a great power. Some would argue that such simplistic statements could not convey the requirements for diplomats as they developed and implemented our foreign policy; however, this approach allowed the statesman great latitude as he conceptualized how these policies were going to be implemented.

After World War II, the United States exploded onto the scene as the dominant world power. The tragedies of World War II had all but drained any other contender for this position. As we progressed through the Korean war and into the Vietnam era, our power base was slowly being eroded by the re-building and rearmament of the USSR. According to William Perry in an article for the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies:

no longer playing from a position of unrivaled strength or relative isolation, it [the United States] must devote far greater conscious attention to the intelligent application of its still vast resources (11-3)

It soon became evident in short that there were other players in the game of foreign policy and that the United States would have to operate in this competitive environment.

Following World War II, the United States developed a series of national security policies that each President thought would allow the United States to regain its position of power. A short review of these policies is necessary to put our objectives in perspective.

After World War II, NSC-68 was President Truman's first attempt to develop a national security policy that would allow the United States to fulfill its responsibilities as a world power. The Soviet Union's rapid development of an atomic bomb after the war exacerbated the decline of power of the United States. Communism was, at this time, seen as in conflict with the world and that immediate action was required by the United States. NSC-68 focused its attention on improving economic conditions, increasing military strength, and developing relations with nations that would improve United States' security interests. Because of the Korean War, NSC-68 was never implemented. Although NSC-68 was not implemented, it forced our senior leadership to recognize the extent of the Soviet threat.

After the Korean War ended, a new concept in national security policy was developed. President Eisenhower found that he was faced with trying to balance military strength with economic strength. Additional pressure was placed on the administration because of the victory of the communist forces in Indochina. NSC-162 was to evolve out of this with a continued focus on the evils of the Soviet Union and the threat they posed to our way of life. NSC-162 placed greater emphasis on the use of

nuclear weapons and the concept of Massive Retaliation as the answer to our security needs evolved.

During President Kennedy's administration, a new view of national security policy was developed. The use of atomic weapons to resolve regional crises was recognized as not effective. General Maxwell Taylor was the first to recognize this weakness in our security policy and he proposed as a solution that the United States should be able to fight local and limited wars. This was to be known as flexible response. Ultimately, it gave the administration options other than initiating a nuclear war.

President Nixon entered office convinced that a new direction in national security policy was needed. The United States still had this morbid fear of communism and our involvement in Vietnam had left significant scars which would help to shape the policy that was to be developed. It was also recognized that the United States could not meet all its commitments under the concept of flexible response. The national security policy that evolved recognized the Soviet Union was the real threat and that the United States no longer accepted communism as a monolith. This was to be known as the Nixon Doctrine and it served both President Nixon and President Ford.

President Carter entered office with a staff that had similar views on national security policy as the previous administrations. Ultimately, he recognized that the Soviets were a threat to our interests and a firm stand must be made to curtail Soviet expansionism. This was to be accomplished by establishing

better security arrangements in the Persian Gulf, and raising the military profile world wide.

One can see that many approaches for national security policy have been developed; all centered on responding to the Soviets. Other changes occurred within the United States that affected how our national security policy was developed. The Watergate incident and the failures in Vietnam, moreover, caused the American public to radically change its view of the Presidency and our responsibilities world wide. No longer could a President initiate incursions into other nation states without clear public support. This lack of trust and this desire to return to isolationism basically made the United States impotent in its dealings with other countries. (12:9)

During this period, a great deal of turmoil existed within the system, as exemplified by several one-term Presidencies. Our founding fathers' design of a government which precluded domination by a single interest group manifested itself in a balance of power between all three branches of government. This forced all policy issues to be debated publicly, and where a clear consensus was not evident, to seek compromise. This public debate led many countries to question the reliability and the consistency of our foreign policy.

All one need do is to pick up any newspaper to see that the United States is not well thought of in the world. Few countries want to be aligned with us, and, in many cases, they do not want to accept aid either. This is much deeper than the rhetoric that one reads in the newspaper. It appears that most

countries do not want to be associated with us simply because we represent more trouble than we return in benefits. In addition, our response to countries with which we have had treaties and which have requested our help has been abysmally poor. Where we have provided economic help, our reputation has been tarnished, for we have exploited the working class in these Third World countries, drained the resources, and made no commitment to social reform.

It is apparent that the United States has over time defined its goals in national security policy. The execution of this policy is of equal importance and should also be examined.

Containment and flexible response respond to communist incursions throughout the world in incremental stages. This was the basis for our involvement in Vietnam. Such an approach guarantees that one will incrementally attack each problem that is presented. Francis E. Rourke, in his book, Bureaucracy, Politics, and Public Policy, states,

Such momentum may also take the form of a series of logical progressive short-term decisions that escalate into consequences far beyond those originally intended. Some observers have interpreted the American involvement in Vietnam in precisely this way, as the product of a series of continuing steps by bureaucratic organizations that were never intended to lead, as they ultimately did, into a major conflict. (12:34)

During President Carter's administration, he initially focused his policy on human rights and attempted to establish a linkage between this concept and our aid to other nations. Attempting to hold other countries accountable for perceived

human rights violations is a noble cause, but it is probably not in our best interest. George F. Kennan, in his book, American Diplomacy, asserted:

... I see the most serious fault of our past policy formulation to be in something that I might call the legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems. . . It is the belief that it should be possible to suppress the chaotic and dangerous aspirations of government in the international field by the acceptance of some system of legal rules and restraints.(7:95)

If this approach had been used by other world powers as they dealt with the United States prior to the full implementation of civil rights in this country, our development might have been significantly different.

As a result of the Vietnam experience, the media became a significant player in the development and implementation of foreign policy. Douglass Carter, in his book, The Fourth Branch of Government reflected this reality in arguing:

The news media have a powerful role in the development of policy because they both reflect and on occasion shape public opinion. (3:-)

Similarly, Francis E. Rourke, in his book, Bureaucracy, Politics and Public Policy, observes:

Nowhere is the influence of the media more keenly felt than in the agencies dealing with foreign policy, for only news organizations have the capacity to gather and disseminate information that may challenge the view point of government officials on areas remote from the average citizen's power of observation (12:197)

So one can see that our foreign policy has been developed along lines that focuses on responding to communist expansionism. Our founding fathers designed the government that was effective in the administration of the thirteen states, but it fails to meet the test in modern times for development and implementation of foreign policy. Our system tends to make changes incrementally and does not identify clear and concise objectives. If we intend to continue to act as a world power, we must have a new and more comprehensive approach.



**CHAPTER III**  
**REGIONAL PROCESS**  
**A WAY TO DEFINE NATIONAL OBJECTIVES**

Senator Goldwater in a speech to the American Business Press in 1963 indicated his concerns: "We need a grand strategy and we need it now. It must be coherent. It must be realistic. It must be sufficient to deter our enemies and protect our friends. And it must be understood by the American people and have their support." (16:10) If the American people are going to support our foreign policy initiatives, they must understand what the United States' national interests and objectives are. It is not enough to attempt to explain our interests and objectives with expressions such as containment of communism, or flexible response. Analysis of our past policies since President Truman have shown that each president has expressed his concept of foreign policy in this manner. These trite expressions do not explain the reasons for our involvement in foreign nations and why it benefits Americans for us to be involved. Once foreign policy is expressed in terms that can be measured by the American public, one can begin to measure the true support for these programs.

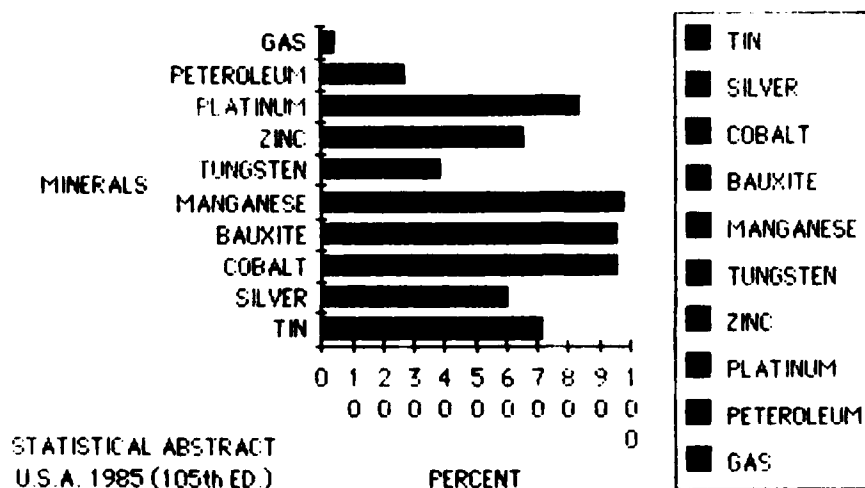
Our national interests and objectives should consider economic interests, common borders, sea lanes of communication, strategic resources and regional ties. This is not a complete list of all areas of interest of the United States, but does represent a

cross section which may be used for the start of our foreign policy development.

One possible approach would be to attempt to develop the policy around our requirements for strategic minerals. There are those who would argue that the strategic minerals concept for determining national interests and objectives is not relevant to the United States' situation. They believe that in a time of national emergency, the United States would develop alternatives for these critical minerals if our strategic supplies were cut off. This is an extremely dangerous and short-sighted view because it does not recognize that our requirements are on-going and our reserves are not sufficient. Even if technology does produce an alternative to these vital resources, there would be a short-fall initially. It also does not recognize the true cost, not only to the United States but also to our allies, as we wait for these alternatives to be developed.

Our nation is dependent on a great number of strategic resources. Shown here are our requirements for imports for 1983 and where they come from:

**MINERAL IMPORTS**  
(in percent based on the net difference  
between imports and exports)



**MINERAL IMPORTS  
BY  
COUNTRY**

<b>GAS</b>	<b>CANADA,ALGERIA,MEXICO</b>
<b>PETEROLEUM</b>	<b>MEXICO,CANADA,SAUL. ARABIA,U.K.</b>
<b>PLATINUM</b>	<b>SO. AFRICA,U.S.S.R.,UNITED KINGDOM</b>
<b>ZINC</b>	<b>CANADA,PERU,MEXICO,AUSTRALIA</b>
<b>TUNGSTEN</b>	<b>CANADA,BOLIVIA,CHINA</b>
<b>MANGANESE</b>	<b>SO.AFRICA,GABON,AUSTRALIA,BRAZIL</b>
<b>BAUXITE</b>	<b>JAMAICA,GUINEA,AUSTRALIA</b>
<b>COBALT</b>	<b>ZAIRE,ZAMBIA,CANADA</b>
<b>SILVER</b>	<b>CANADA,MEXICO,PERU,UNITED KINGDOM</b>
<b>TIN</b>	<b>BOLIVIA,MALAYSIA,THAILAND</b>

STATISTICAL ABSTRACT  
U.S.A.(105th ED.)

By defining our foreign policy in relationship to strategic resources, we then have a policy that is not based on Soviet incursions but is based on the United States' national interests and objectives as its central thesis. Michael Nacht, in his article, "American Security Interests Around The World," states:

This would be especially true in situations where the asymmetry of stakes favored the United States. It is vitally important that the American action be restricted to those regions and situations where the intrinsic value of the assets in question and the motivation to acquire them are closer to the U S Security interests than to those of the Soviet Union or other potential adversaries. (9:262)

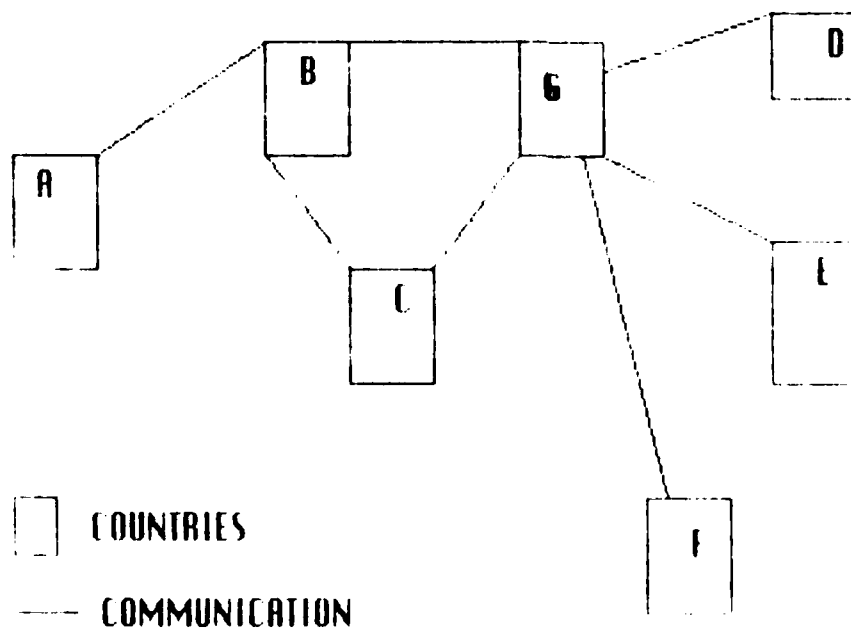
A second concept for defining our national interests and objectives would be to examine those areas where the United States may have a common border which could become vulnerable. This approach recognizes that the principal aim of our foreign policy is safe-guarding the nation's security so that our way of life at home may be preserved and enjoyed.

Economic interests are also another way of expressing our national interests and objectives. Our trading partners and how our goods and services are shipped between countries (sea lanes) are essential in this process.

The United States has in the past practiced its foreign policy by providing aid to country A, while foregoing help to country B. These countries were located in the same region and because of this capricious and arbitrary practice of selective aid, America is not viewed in all areas of this region as a benefactor. It seems that if we are to provide assistance to an area we must

provide it to the region to prevent this type of antagonism. By implementing the policy in this manner, certain economies of scale would be evident in that some countries would help solve regional problems without United States assistance. This concept of regional relationships requires further discussion.

One must recognize that any region is made up not of a single country, but of many countries linked together by ethnic ties, geography and history. Ultimately, these countries form a network and have subtle relationships which can be exploited. Simply stated, there are nested relationships between countries within any given region. Here, in a simplistic manner, is how those relationships may be arrayed:



**COUNTRY NETWORK MODEL**

In the case of country G, it has direct relationships with all countries except country A. A current example of this type of network can be found in the European Common Market.

One can see from this simplistic example that there may be utility in developing this network concept as we develop our regional strategies. What makes this concept important to the United States is that many countries need military and economic assistance, and there are not enough resources in the United States to solve the world's problems. It seems that there might be utility in using regional networks to solve some of the regional problems, through reliance on their own internal resources.

Now, one cannot leave this subject of networks without pointing out some of the problems associated with the concept. Although ethnic ties and historical relationships may link these areas, they also have the potential to preclude the formulation of networks. As societies develop, they may have developed prejudices, as a result of prior associations, that cannot be overcome. A second problem associated with this concept may be that the region, as a whole, does not have enough resources to solve some of the internal problems.

The approach that has been described suggests a conscious choice as to where and why the United States should get involved. Our focus is now on what is best for the United States as opposed to responding to what the Soviets are doing. It makes us competitive in this competitive environment because we

are no longer on the defensive. This approach to foreign policy development and execution tends to stabilize the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States in that neither can overestimate the other's intentions.

## CHAPTER IV

### CENTRAL AMERICA A TEST CASE

In an attempt to demonstrate the potential use of a regional concept for foreign policy development utilizing the previous concepts of national interests and objectives, Central America will be examined to illustrate some of the principles. For a clear understanding of the nature of the problem, the history of the area and the United States' national interests will be discussed briefly. President Reagan expressed his concerns about Central America in a statement:

I say to you tonight there can be no question. The national security of all Americas is at stake in Central America. If we cannot defend ourselves there, we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere. Our credibility would collapse, our alliance would crumble and the safety of our home land would be put at jeopardy. We have a vital interest, a moral duty and a solemn responsibility. This is not a partisan issue. It is a question of our meeting our moral responsibility to ourselves, our friends and our posterity. It is a duty that falls to all of us - the President, the Congress and the people. We must perform it together. Who among us would wish to bear the responsibility for failing to meet our shared obligations? (12:12)

Central America is our neighbor and, as a result of its geographic location, constitutes a true security interest to us. Portions of it provide the buffer to the soft underbelly of the United States. In addition, they lie astride critical sea lanes that link the United States with the world outside the Western



hemisphere, as well as the east and west coasts of the United States itself.

There are significant economic interests, too, which must be considered. These derive from the large American banks and business investments in Central America, also the region's huge foreign debts, and as the region's major role as a United States' trading partner. This area also has significant natural resources of strategic importance to the United States. Shown in Figure 1 are these interests in Central America.

President Reagan indicated that Central America was of significant importance to the United States. It is also evident that there are clear and definable national interests and objectives in Central America that are critical to the United States. If one is to propose a policy that will address some of these issues, one must understand the history of the area. In this process of analyzing the history, our past foreign policy will also be examined to determine whether it was a success or failure.

When one looks at the history of Central America, one finds that the colonial experience left marks which hindered political and economic development. The Indian people retained as part of the colonial legacy a semi-fuedal system, based on large land holdings and the exploitation of indigenous labor. Political independence did bring some change to the area, with three concepts of government evolving -- that of authoritarian rule, democracy, and socialism. All of these, however, existed in a very unstable environment. This instability allowed the military to become the dominant political factor within much of the region.

## ECONOMIC INTERESTS

(Figure 1)



\* STRATEGIC RESOURCES  
SEA LANES

History has demonstrated that the United States' foreign policy in Central America has been less than successful. The United States has pursued a relatively selfish policy in this area. It has used military assistance to help rectify a perceived threat to governments which had displayed a friendly attitude toward the United States. This assistance succeeded in the short term but usually failed in the long run. The failure has resulted from the fact that the governments supported had miserable records concerning human rights and did not meet the basic needs of their people. When these governments were overthrown, the people of that country indicted the United States and declared us guilty by association. The ultimate outcome was a reduction in our influence.

The United States has also been interested in keeping radical guerrilla movements from gaining a foothold in the region. Our approach has been to attempt to change the conditions that allow these movements to flourish and develop. However, the assistance that has been provided has only served to worsen the conditions and amplify the inequities. This conclusion is supported by the fact that no major aid program is sufficient to improve the economic conditions that exist, and to deal with the required changes in the political structure.

The United States has tended to state its interests regionally but to differentiate sharply between countries in practice. This has created a perception of neglect of the region as viewed by Central Americans.

Our greed and benign neglect has also allowed poverty, starvation, and deplorable conditions to exist for seventy years, and now it is our desire to correct them overnight. This approach to solving the problem quickly will only make the situation worse. These problems are extremely complex and will require extensive attention over a very long period of time. It is also essential that the chosen course of action must be consistent and without turmoil to lend to stability and improve our image in the area.

As one can see, the region confronts a significant crisis in both internal and external terms. Its internal problems are a product of the legacy of colonial powers. The external ones stem from soaring energy costs, world recession, inflated interest rates, and a general miscalculation of the predicted revenues from industrialized countries. While energy costs in the recent past have been extremely high, there is tremendous pressure to lower the cost of oil produced, and as a result countries that have oil as their primary resource are now without significant revenues. Additional problems are created by the USSR and Cuba as they export their form of revolution throughout the region.

Our foreign policy that addresses the problems of Central America is facing several distinct challenges. Economic issues are the grass-root ones that must be addressed if this area is ever to prosper and mature. Many democracies now exist within the region, but they are extremely fragile. The economic crisis must be rectified, or these fragile democracies will be replaced by other less desirable forms of government.

These problems cannot be dealt with in isolation. Every industrialized country must contribute to this regional policy or Central America, as we know it, is doomed. The debts of this region potentially threaten the economies of all the industrialized nations that loaned them money. Economic conditions must be corrected within these countries, or the countries will not be able to repay their loans. Ultimately, their default could have the effect of causing failures in banks throughout the world. It is in the best interests of all the industrialized states to resolve these conditions and develop economies that can have real growth.

The first part of a United States policy relevant to the situation must address the development of a true regional alliance. The United States should encourage Central American countries to come together and participate in regional undertakings and attempt to build upon common interests. Ultimately these efforts could resolve many of the problems now associated with the countries in Central America. This approach would tend, in the long run, to reduce the burden of support the United States now provides.

Some may say this would be too expensive for the Central American countries, however, the reduction in cost would take place in the future as these countries become more self-sufficient. Stability would be improved with power more uniformly distributed across a much broader and worldwide base. Ultimately, world tensions would be reduced.

It also would be in the United States' best interest to have many partners, with adequate power, interested in similar,

jointly-agreed-upon undertakings. It would not be our intent to have clones of the United States as our regional partners, but there are clearly common interests which can be developed.

This approach would likewise help eliminate the perception of the United States as being uninterested in the social change necessary in Third World countries. It is important to recognize that as a world power which, in the eyes of the Third World, has everything, what we do to help these countries, if not handled correctly, would be misinterpreted.

There is a risk associated with this approach in that members of the alliance may attempt to manipulate others for gain which would pose serious threats to stability. Furthermore, the alliance may get so powerful that it could not be controlled. While this is a potential problem, it does not seem to be an issue in the near term.

The significant economic issues involved in this area are extremely complex and very difficult to handle. Above all, the issue of the billions of dollars of debt, and the interest that is due on the debt, must be resolved. One could sponsor renegotiated terms with lower interest rates, on the expectation that improvements in the region's economies will occur simultaneously. This solution puts most of the pressure on agencies external to Central America and it is a known fact that there are not enough resources locally available to effectively resolve this crisis. What is required is that the industrialized nations of this area respond and develop a strategy which will help eliminate the problem. External support and internal support are absolutely essential.

Regional alliances and the networks associated with them could help to improve the economies internal to Central America. Investment by the United States as an external stimulus into these countries will certainly contribute to improvement of some of the economic conditions.

There are risks associated with these economic solutions. First, these countries, even with renegotiated terms on their loans, may not be able to repay the principal. External investment, by the United States, will reduce the number of jobs available in this country which poses a significant political problem for any administration. However, the situation is so critical that one must take these risks because the consequences are so grave to the world economy that they warrant our attention.

One can conclude that this region is of vital interest to the United States. Yet, too frequently in the past, our attention has been diverted by other things and/or issues in the world. It has also been a common failing to see everything from our perspective, sometimes forgetting that this is not a one-dimensional world but has a human dimension that also must be addressed. Historically, our focus for foreign policy has been to prevent the spread of Soviet influence. While this approach has allowed us to operate with a reasonable amount of success, it is significantly flawed for a world power. This Central American model has shown that many of the requirements for a regional strategy can be met and, as a result, a significant supporting constituency can be developed within the United States for this

policy because clear national interests and objectives can be stated.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

One can conclude that American foreign policy, in the past, has not been completely satisfactory. Whether one attempts to measure our performance by a cost-benefit analysis or to examine it in a subjective manner, one comes to the conclusion that we have not done well within the foreign policy arena since World War II. Vast technology changes, a government designed to administer thirteen states, great turmoil, and a genuine mistrust by the American public have contributed to this state of affairs. It seems essential that change take place if we are to maintain our position in the world as a world power.

There is little we can do to alter the way our government works. It is designed to guarantee that no one power within the administration will dominate, and compromise is a way of life. No matter how frustrating this system appears, it is central to effective democracies. It is, therefore, a circumstance that will continue to exist as long as we have a democracy within the United States.

Our inability to articulate clear and concise national interests and objectives has put our foreign policy process in jeopardy. Each new administration attempts to develop its strategy for foreign policy without a firm understanding of what the United States' national interests and objectives are. A regional strategy, based on strategic minerals, common borders and sea lanes of communications, would go a long way to serve the

purpose of strategy development. It gives us a more objective method of defining what our national interests are and, ultimately, what our foreign policy should be.

Since the Vietnam War, there has been a tremendous mistrust among the American people about United States foreign policy. This is as a result of not being able to show why we need to be involved in a specific area. It also is the result of poor decisions made concerning foreign policy without regard to a clear understanding of the United States' national interests and objectives. A regional approach that has more consistency and is, as a result, more successful should build an American constituency that will support our foreign policy.

America has been the melting pot of the world in that every nationality and ethnic group is represented here in the United States. Clearly, such ethnic forces will be able to support regional foreign policy development. It appears we have little choice in that our present approach does not adequately deal with the problems of foreign policy. The approach that is proposed in this paper would be difficult and extremely complex to implement, however, the returns would in all likelihood be immense. If America wants to remain a world power, it cannot be without an adequate foreign policy. It appears it is time for a change.

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